

# **Enhancing Graduate Employability through Career Fairs: A Case Study of TAR UMT Johor Branch's Efforts in Bridging the Education-to-Employment Gap**

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**Abstract**

This case study examines the Career Fair 2025 held at Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) Johor Branch, located in a rural area of Malaysia. The event aimed to improve employability among graduates and the wider community by providing direct interaction between job seekers and employers. Despite 17 employers participating and 662 vacancies, only 35 of 165 attendees secured immediate job placements, exposing a significant gap between graduate readiness and employer expectations. The study pinpoints key contributing factors, including limited practical experience, underdeveloped soft skills, and challenges specific to rural settings. It further discusses necessary interventions by universities, employers, and policymakers, such as career readiness workshops, internships, and stronger university-industry collaborations. This case study offers valuable insights into the real-world challenges of employability, allowing students to assess organisational and policy responses and propose actionable solutions to bridge the education-to-employment gap in less developed regions.

**Keywords:** Graduate Employability, Career Fairs, Education-To-Employment Gap, Workforce Readiness, Soft Skills, University-Industry Collaboration

**Introduction**

The transition from higher education to the workforce has become increasingly complex due to the rapidly evolving job market. A university degree, once regarded as sufficient for employment, now represents only a baseline qualification (Forbes, 2024). Globally, employers seek graduates who possess not only academic knowledge but also a diverse set of soft skills, such as communication, adaptability, and problem-solving (Pitan & Muller, 2019). Many graduates remain disconnected from the practical realities of the workforce and encounter challenges, including inadequate communication skills, limited work experience, insufficient awareness of job-market expectations, and unrealistic salary expectations (Ismail et al., 2019; Ng, 2021).

Graduate unemployment and underemployment have risen in Malaysia over the past decade. Data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024) show that approximately 12.1% of fresh graduates remain unemployed six months after graduation. This challenge is particularly acute in smaller towns such as Segamat, where job opportunities are limited and graduates often lack access to large-scale recruitment networks (Ng, 2021). Ng (2021) and Ismail et al. (2019) report that a significant proportion of Malaysian employers consider fresh graduates ill-prepared for the workplace due to inadequate soft skills and insufficient exposure to industry practices, indicating that a university degree alone is insufficient.

Although many studies address employability skills conceptually, there is limited empirical evidence evaluating the effectiveness of structured career interventions, particularly in rural Malaysian contexts. The present study is significant as it advances beyond theoretical discussion to offer actionable, evidence-based insights for universities, students, employers, and policymakers. Specifically, it provides universities with empirical data on the impact of career fairs on immediate job placement, interview exposure, and professional development. For students, the study highlights employer expectations and underscores the importance of soft skills and professional preparation. Furthermore, most employability research focuses on urban institutions, leaving branch campuses and rural universities underexplored (Ismail et

al., 2019). In summary, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature and contributes evidence-based findings to both theory and practice in employability development.

### *Case Background*

To address this gap, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) Johor Branch, Malaysia, collaborated with the Segamat Social Security Organisation (SOCSO), which has extensive experience in conducting career fairs with government funding, and the Sekijang parliament office, which provided financial support to organise the Career Fair 2025 on 14 March 2025.

A ten-person team comprising lecturers and administrative staff at Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) Johor Branch was established to organise a career fair intended to benefit both TAR UMT students and the surrounding Segamat community. The team consulted with the Segamat Social Security Organisation (SOCSO), leveraging SOCSO's experience in conducting annual career fairs with government funding. Financial support was also sought from the nearby Sekijang Parliament Office. Following several discussions, the team presented the proposal to university top management, who approved and funded the initiative. The programme was designed to serve as both a student development opportunity and a corporate social responsibility initiative for the local community. Additional funding from the Sekijang Parliament Office enabled transportation for attendees from nearby academic institutions. SOCSO further assisted by promoting the event and providing guidance to the TAR UMT team in organising their inaugural career fair at the Johor Branch.

A total of 40 student helpers from the "Introduction to Human Resource Management" class participated in the programme, which provided them with practical experience, particularly in recruitment and selection processes within the context of a career fair. The event took place at the ICT Centre Atrium, TAR UMT Johor Branch, on 14 March 2025. The programme was strategically scheduled one day before the graduation ceremony to enable graduating students, who were collecting their convocation gowns at the same location, to access immediate career opportunities. Promotion was conducted via the university's Facebook page, banners displayed at prominent locations in Segamat, and flyers distributed at shopping malls and nearby academic institutions with the assistance of student helpers.

The primary objective of the MYFUTUREJOBS Career Fair 2025 was to provide employment opportunities for job seekers and fresh graduates, as well as to offer first-time experience for students in resume preparation and understanding employers' expectations. The event aimed to give students and graduates a direct opportunity to interact with potential employers. Additionally, it sought to enhance employability by providing participants with career consultations, resume-writing workshops, and opportunities to attend on-the-spot interviews. These activities were designed to equip attendees with the skills necessary to succeed in a competitive job market. Furthermore, the fair aimed to foster community engagement by welcoming local residents, alongside students and graduates, ensuring that everyone had access to career development opportunities.

The MYFUTUREJOBS Career Fair 2025 primarily aimed to provide employment opportunities for job seekers and recent graduates, while also offering students their first experience in resume preparation and understanding employers' expectations. The event facilitated direct interaction between students, graduates, and potential employers. To further enhance employability, the fair included career consultations, resume-writing workshops, and on-the-spot interview opportunities. These initiatives were intended to equip participants with essential skills for success in a competitive job market. In addition, the fair promoted community engagement by inviting local residents, ensuring broad access to career development resources.

The programme featured a range of activities. Company booths were established at 7 a.m., enabling participating organizations to display job postings and engage with job seekers. VIPs from the Parliament Office and SOCSO officiated the opening ceremony, which included a welcome address by the head of the Johor Campus Branch. Certificates of participation were awarded to all 17 participating companies. Registration commenced at the front counter, followed by an initial resume screening process where students received guidance on suitable companies based on their qualifications and interests, and were then directed to the appropriate booths by student assistants. On-the-spot interviews provided participants with the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and potentially receive immediate job offers. Professional career consultations supported attendees in aligning their qualifications with available positions. Workshops on resume writing, interview techniques, and job market trends were also conducted to further enrich the experience. Additionally, students participated in a small business initiative by operating booths selling food and custom-designed t-shirts, generating income for student society activities.

The Career Fair primarily targeted graduates attending the convocation, offering them a convenient opportunity to explore career options while still on campus. Current students seeking internships or part-time employment were also encouraged to participate, as these roles provided valuable work experience. The event further aimed to engage local residents interested in career development, with a goal of attracting approximately 200 participants. No fees were charged to students or companies, as the event was organised exclusively for corporate social responsibility (CSR) purposes and not for profit generation. The fair promoted inclusivity by welcoming a diverse range of individuals and ensuring that all attendees could access resources and opportunities to advance their careers.

The Career Fair aligned with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 4: Quality Education, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. The event advanced SDG 8 by facilitating connections between participants and employers, thereby supporting full and productive employment and fostering long-term professional growth. SDG 4 was addressed through career consultations and skill development workshops that enhanced employability and prepared participants for workforce success. Additionally, the fair supported SDG 10 by ensuring equitable access to career opportunities, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate and benefit from the available resources.

Although everything was planned well, the team faced some challenges. Our target audience of 200 participants was not achieved, as only 165 attended the event. Despite this,

the event demonstrated a strong industry presence, with 17 employers offering 126 immediate job positions and a total of 662 vacancies. Over the course of the event, 257 interview sessions were conducted, but only 35 on-the-spot hires were made, with some candidates shortlisted for second-round interviews. Many students and graduates were unprepared for interviews, with a playful mindset and not recognize the seriousness of the job market. They had not yet faced the challenges of finding a job and were unaware of how difficult it can be to secure a position with their qualifications in the current market. Students struggled to perform well in interviews because they lacked the necessary skills. Based on employer feedback, community members performed better than students because they had more interview experience. However, some students gained their first interview experience, accepted that they were not fully prepared to answer questions, and recognized the need to prepare better for future opportunities.

### **Methodology**

The data for this case study were collected from two main sources: participant Google Form responses and job placement data compiled by PERKESO. During registration, participants scanned a QR code, and their demographic information, including gender, race, age, education level, and employment status, was captured. Additionally, participants' resumes were screened by staff to match them with suitable employers. The QR code scanning continued at each company booth, where participants' engagement was tracked. PERKESO compiled data from all the booths and conducted interviews with 17 employers to collect detailed information on job vacancies, interviews, and on-the-spot hires.

For the data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate participants' demographic characteristics. This included analysing the frequency and percentage distribution of gender, race, age, education level, and employment status based on the data gathered from the Google Forms. The job placement data was also analysed, including the number of job vacancies listed, the number of interviews conducted, and the number of participants hired on the spot. This analysis helped assess the immediate impact of the career fair on job placement.

The qualitative analysis focused on feedback from both employers and participants. Employers provided insights into job seekers' preparedness during interviews, and the performance of students was compared with that of community members with more interview experience. Participants were also asked to reflect on their experiences, particularly on their readiness for interviews and the value of gaining first-job interview experience. This qualitative data provided insight into how the event contributed to participants' professional development and highlighted areas for improvement in future events.

### **Data Analysis and Result**

This section focuses on the frequency analysis used to examine participants' demographic characteristics. Data collected from the Career Fair 2025: My Future Job, held at Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT), Johor Branch on 14 March 2025, revealed a total of 165 participants, which was below the target of 200 attendees, indicating moderate participation from both students and job seekers. The collected data provided valuable insights into the participants' demographics, including gender, race, age, educational level, and current employment status, as outlined in Table 4.1.

This information helps to better understand the composition of the attendees and their suitability for the various job opportunities available at the event.

Table 1

*Demographic characteristics*

Characteristics of participants	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	73	44.2
Female	92	55.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Race:</b>		
Malay	69	41.8
Chinese	77	46.7
Indian	19	11.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age:</b>		
18 – 24 years-old	68	41.2
25 – 29 years-old	69	41.8
35 – 39 years-old	1	0.6
40 – 44 years-old	26	15.8
45 – 49 years-old	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Education level:</b>		
SPM/SKM 1/SKM 2/SM 3/ O LEVEL	55	33.3
STPM	6	3.6
Diploma	40	24.2
Bachelor's degree	59	35.8
Master	3	1.8
PhD	2	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Employment status:</b>		
Student	75	45.5
Employed	21	12.7
Unemployed	68	41.2
Internship	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In terms of **gender**, the sample comprised slightly more females (n = 92, 55.8%) than males (n = 73, 44.2%). This indicates a balanced representation of both genders, with a modest female majority. Regarding **race**, most respondents were Chinese (n = 77, 46.7%), followed by Malay (n = 69, 41.8%), and Indian (n = 19, 11.5%). This reflects a relatively diverse race composition, in line with Malaysia's multicultural society. For the **age distribution**, the largest age group was individuals aged 25–29 years (n = 69, 41.8%), followed closely by those aged 18–24 years (n = 68, 41.2%). A smaller proportion of participants were aged 40–44 years (n = 26, 15.8%), while only one participant each was reported in the age groups 35–39 years

(0.6%) and 45–49 years (0.6%). This indicates that the sample was largely composed of young adults. Regarding **educational background**, most respondents held a **Bachelor's degree** (n = 59, 35.8%) or had completed **SPM/SKM/O-Level** qualifications (n = 55, 33.3%). Additionally, 24.2% (n = 40) held a Diploma, while the remaining respondents had qualifications at the **STPM** (n = 6, 3.6%), **Master's** (n = 3, 1.8%), or **PhD** level (n = 2, 1.2%). This shows a relatively educated sample, with a considerable proportion possessing tertiary-level qualifications. As for **employment status**, most participants were **students** (n = 75, 45.5%), followed by **unemployed individuals** (n = 68, 41.2%). A smaller portion were **employed** (n = 21, 12.7%), and one respondent was undergoing an **internship** (0.6%). These findings suggest that the sample predominantly consisted of individuals who were not in full-time employment.

### *Job Placement Rate*

According to the data, 165 participants attended the Career Fair 2025: My Future Job. Initially, 20 companies had registered, but only 17 participated, with three cancelling at the last minute. This indicates moderate industry interest and support, reflecting a growing recognition among employers of the importance of engaging with such initiatives to identify potential talent and develop industry-relevant skills. The event showcased a strong employment outlook, with 126 job positions immediately available for application, demonstrating employers' readiness to recruit qualified candidates on the spot and highlighting the event's practical value for job seekers. Additionally, the total number of job vacancies listed reached an impressive 662, suggesting that many employers were offering multiple openings for the same position or were open to hiring several candidates for similar roles.

The career fair resulted high engagement from employers but lower participation from job seekers, particularly students, with a total of 257 interview sessions conducted during the event. This substantial number of interviews reflects the employers' willingness to dedicate time to assessing potential hires on-site. However, it also revealed that many candidates were unprepared, as only 35 were hired on the spot, indicating that the event was only moderately successful in matching job seekers with immediate employment opportunities. Additionally, 183 candidates were shortlisted for second-round interviews. This figure includes duplicate candidates who attended interviews at multiple companies, suggesting that many were not qualified for immediate hiring and required further evaluation. Meanwhile, 39 candidates did not progress past the initial interview stage, highlighting the competitive nature of the recruitment process. All the information has been summarised and presented in Figure 4.1.



Figure 1 Job Placement Rate

*Top Hiring Employers*

Based on the data obtained, five employers with the highest hiring activity were identified as having the highest level of hiring activity during the event. The following are the top five hiring employers during the event, as demonstrated in Table 4.2.

Table 2

*Top five hiring employers*

No.	Company Name	Nature of Business
1	Bateriku (M) Sdn. Bhd.	Automotive battery delivery, replacement, and roadside assistance services.
2	YYC Management Services Sdn. Bhd.	Accounting, tax, and business advisory services.
3	Sunway Bigbox Hotel Sdn. Bhd.	Hospitality – Hotel and accommodation services.
4	Nirvana Memorial Park (Segamat) Sdn. Bhd.	Bereavement care services – Funeral planning and memorial parks.
5	D'Jue Wellness Globals Sdn. Bhd.	Health and wellness – Spa, beauty, and wellness products/services.

**Discussion**

The Career Fair 2025 at Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) Johor Branch, Malaysia, provided key insights into graduate employability trends, particularly within the rural context. Despite 17 employers and 662 vacancies, only 35 of 165 participants (21.2%) secured immediate job placements. This outcome indicates a moderate outcome for the career fair, as not all participants performed as expected, particularly given the low response rate from TAR UMT students compared to attendees from outside the university. The demographic analysis showed that the majority of participants were aged 18-29, with many being final-year students, recent graduates from TAR UMT, and members of the Segamat community. While most participants held higher education qualifications, predominantly bachelor's degrees and diplomas, employers highlighted a significant gap in job readiness, which aligns with the findings of Ismail et al. (2019) and Ng (2021), who noted the disparity between academic qualifications and employers' expectations.

As argued by Ismail et al. (2019), job readiness is not solely determined by academic qualifications but is also shaped by soft skills, work experience, and proactive job-seeking behaviours. While career fairs can serve as valuable platforms for bridging the education-to-employment gap, their success is limited by job seekers' own efforts to improve their competencies. At the TAR UMT career fair, the low placement rate underscored a misalignment between graduate preparation and employer expectations, particularly evident in the playful behaviour of some students who did not approach the event with the seriousness required in a competitive job market. Many students appeared unaware of the limitations of the job market and were ill-prepared to face the challenges of securing employment, highlighting the need for graduates to develop transferable skills such as communication, adaptability, and self-presentation, which are often lacking in fresh graduates. Furthermore, Suroto et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of soft skills, experiential learning, and contextual factors in shaping job readiness, while Ng (2021) and

Ling et al. (2020) indicated that graduates from rural areas face additional challenges due to limited exposure to industry expectations and insufficient industry collaborations.

According to Ling et al. (2020), institutions with strong career guidance and solid industry connections tend to achieve better employment outcomes, underscoring the need for universities to adopt a more practical, proactive approach to preparing students for the workforce. Universities, particularly in rural areas, should incorporate career readiness into their curricula, focusing on soft skills, digital literacy, and hands-on learning experiences. These efforts would better equip graduates to meet employers' expectations and ensure they are prepared for the challenges of the job market. Therefore, TAR UMT must also emphasise the importance of self-preparation and the enhancement of job competence, in line with current market requirements for their students. It is crucial to highlight the seriousness of the competitive job market, which demands a skilled workforce and relies on more than just educational qualifications.

In addition, Lin et al (2020) argued that universities should collaborate with NGOs and the government to organise career fairs to improve employment outcomes. The government should encourage universities to organise career fairs and provide funding, allowing each institution to tailor these events to its expertise and local industry needs. These events could bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring that students gain the relevant skills and connections. Additionally, the outcomes of career fairs should be included in national employability metrics, with transparent reporting on the effectiveness of placements and feedback from all stakeholders. Such government-led initiatives can help universities enhance employability and better align graduates with labour-market needs.

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